BLACK DECEMBER: MEMORY IS A WEAPON
DESTITUTION & TROLLING
MIRROR, KALEIDOSCOPE, DAGGER: WHAT IS ANARCHISM?
FUCK YOUR SELFIE: ON THE SPECTACLE OF RESISTANCE
“GOOD TV” AS A ROADBLOCK
TO A TRODDEN PANSY: REMEMBERING LOUIS LINGG
NIGHT OWLS DISRUPT TIMBER SALE
DEER: 1 COMPUTERS: 0
Plain Words is a website and publication that focuses on spreading news and developing analyses of struggles in and around Bloomington, Indiana. As anarchists, we approach these struggles from an anti-state, anti-capitalist perspective. However, we aren't interested in developing a specific party line – even an anarchist one – and instead value the diverse forms resistance can take. Our anarchism is vibrant, undogmatic, and finds common cause with all others who fight for a world without the state, capital, and all structures of domination.

All texts and images in Plain Words are taken from the internet or submitted to us by others. We are not an organization or specific group, but simply a vehicle for spreading words and actions of resistance in Bloomington.

As such, we actively seek collaboration. If you have news, images, reportbacks of actions and demonstrations, communiqués, event information, publications, analyses of local trends and situations, updates on projects and campaigns, or anything else coming from an anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist perspective, please get in touch.

If you have comments on or critiques of anything we've printed that you'd like us to publish, feel free to send them our way.

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We burn the night to call forth the spirit of William “Avalon” Rodgers, earth liberationist who committed suicide on the 2005 Winter Solstice while in jail on charges of bringing fire to the pillagers of the wild.

To honor these fighters, we do not just cry. We do not merely fold our hands and lament the brutality of the state against our comrades. We do not flinch in fear over their deaths. We act. We keep alive their struggles by continuing to fight. Whatever our means, whatever our context: through intransigent revolt our comrades’ hearts still beat.

For Alexandros & Angry
For Kuwasi & Avalon
For all things wild, peace by piece

Memory is a weapon – one we too often neglect to brandish in our battles. It is easy, trapped as we are in the tales of progress, to forget what and who came before us, who burned paths that serve now as trail markers for insurgents. To forget is to be lost in a forest. To forget is to have no history.

The act of remembering is a defiant gesture. Against our lobotomization by technology. Against the sterilization of history by the state’s schools. Against the pacification of revolutionary lives by official history and its narratives of progress. Against the amnesia that would erase the examples of those who paid for freedom with their lives. To begin to fight this society, its rotten authority, and its poisonous ideologies, we should first remember.

December hangs heavy upon us, but also lights inextinguishable fires. We mourn Alexandros Grigoropoulos, 15 year old anarchist murdered by police in December 2008 in Athens, whose death set off weeks of open war against the Greek state.

We grieve for Sebastián Oversluïj – “Angry” – irrepressible anarchist killed on December 11, 2013 by a bank’s paid dog while attempting to expropriate money in Santiago, Chile.

We seethe with rage over the

December 9, 1983

As to the seventy-five years i am not really worried, not only because i am in the habit of not completing sentences or waiting on parole or any of that nonsense but also because the state simply isn’t going to last seventy-five or even fifty years.

Kuwasi Balagoon, December 9, 1983

To my friends and supporters to help them make sense of all these events that have happened so quickly. Certain human cultures have been waging war against the Earth for millennia. I chose to fight on the side of bears, mountain lions, skunks, bats, saguaros, cliff rose and all things wild. I am just the most recent casualty in that war. But tonight I have made a jail break – i am returning home, to the Earth, to the place of my origins.

William “Avalon” Rodgers, December 21, 2005
A disoriented 250-pound deer broke through two glass doors at an east-side computer store, thrashed — bleeding — through the plate-glass front door that leads to a reception area. Inside the vestibule, the deer arrived at 10:30 a.m. Friday by breaking through the plate-glass front door that leads to the 5,000-square-foot store, where it continued its rampage.

“Maybe he didn’t know there was glass there or saw his reflection and was running toward it,” Collins said.

No employees at Key Computer were injured but broken glass was everywhere, where, a desktop computer was destroyed and blood was splattered on the walls, equipment and carpet.

“The subject is not whether we accomplish anarchism today, tomorrow, or within ten centuries, but that we walk towards anarchism today, tomorrow, and always,” Errico Malatesta, “Towards Anarchism”

What is anarchism? The question itself opens like a budding flower, exposing further questions. Do we speak of anarchism as a political theory, with its corresponding list of important books and figures? Or of anarchism as an approach to life, a way of living one’s days in a way that is liberating? Anarchism can be both of these — and much more — because it is elusive, defiant of orthodoxy and final words. Let us not speak of anarchism in the manner of library shelves, or the meaningless words. Let us not speak of anarchism in the language of library shelves, or the meaningless words. Let us not speak of anarchism in the language of library shelves, or the meaningless words. Let us not speak of anarchism in the language of library shelves, or the meaningless words. Let us not speak of anarchism in the language of library shelves, or the meaningless words.

Anarchism as mirror

It is impossible to envision a free world when our everyday lives are poisoned by systems of power, and organized, from others (the cycles of abuse that plague our relationships, the petty snitch mentality), and from others (our own acceptance of and participation in the above). Anarchism offers us a mirror with which to evaluate ourselves, to recognize faults and, ultimately, to make changes.

Am I capable of living without authority? This question breaks through all hand-setting about utopias, bringing our ideal world into dialogue with our own behavior. Are we slavish, sycophantic, submissive? Are we exploitative, dishonest, manipulative? Are we dominating, uncaring, sadistic? Are we living our lives, now, in a way that opens doors for experiments in freedom — or has all of this world’s bitterness diminished our capacity for simple human kindness?

The mirror exposes us for what we are, and only through this will we change. Anarchism does not wait for “material conditions” or the “contradictions of capitalism” to transform us — it demands we sow the seeds of a new humanity now. Whatever one’s personal inclination toward or against violence, the reality of our lives within capitalism and under the state is one of ruthless brutality and exploitation. This will not be done away with by simply wishing it were so, or by loving the hand that beats us. To retaliate against the violence of work and law, property and alienation, is self-defense. More importantly, it is a small assurance that those who wish to violate us will not do so without repercussions. In the face of

Anarchism as dagger

Such has been made of the anarchist as wild-eyed bomb thrower, and much more has been written in response to those “anarchists” who fall over each other to distance themselves from any tinge of violence. Whatever one’s personal inclination toward or against violence, the reality of our lives within capitalism and under the state is one of ruthless brutality and exploitation. This will not be done away with by simply wishing it were so, or by loving the hand that beats us. To retaliate against the violence of work and law, property and alienation, is self-defense. More importantly, it is a small assurance that those who wish to violate us will not do so without repercussions.
SOLIDARITY WITH MICHAEL KIMBLE

Michael Kimble is a gay, black anarchist held captive by the state of Alabama. In 1986, Michael and a friend were attacked by a man spouting racist and homophobic slurs. Refusing to be another victim of white supremacist, heterosexist violence, Michael fought back, killing the man who attacked him. For this, he was given life in prison, a term which he continues to serve to this day.

Throughout the ’90s, Michael came upon revolutionary literature – initially identifying as a communist. Eventually, he came to anarchism, inspired by individuals like Black Liberation Army fighter and revolutionary anarchist Kevin Abu Baldwin. In Michael’s own words, “anarchism is not about building a hierarchical structure for liberation somewhere in the distant future, but about living your life, now, in a fashion that’s liberating.” This politicization was accompanied by active engagement in struggles going on in Alabama prisons. For decades, Michael has participated in collective battles against prison slavery and brutality by guards, as well as individual action in defense of other prisoners and against the prison authorities. As prison revolts in Alabama spread throughout 2016, Michael was present in C-Dorm, the epicenter of incendiary attacks by prisoners against their captors.

Michael remains active in the struggles at Holman prison, always seeking to push away from compromise and reform towards revolt and the destruction of the state in its totality. Self-defense against bigots requires no justification, and we should stand with those rebelling against the overseers of the modern-day slave plantations called prisons. Uncompromising solidarity is the flame we carry forth until Michael, the prisoner rebels at Holman, and all captives of the state are free.

If you would like to contact Michael or read more of his writings, visit: anarchylive.noblogs.org

Night Owls Paint and Exteriors

posted to Earth First! Newsire, November 13, 2017

Night Owls Disrupt

Yellowwood State Forest Timber Sale

So during the weekend following the sale, we painted hundreds of additional trees to mark those the DNR had marked for removal in two of three tracts on the chopping block. We did this to obscure the trees Hamilton Logging bought, and to force the DNR Division of Forestry to redo the work of marking these tracts, thus delaying when logging can start.

We understand there is a risk that these additional trees could be cut down, but only if the DNR Division of Forestry and Hamilton Logging show unprecedented, intentional negligence, by letting a group of pranksters mark the trees for them. Logging all currently-marked trees would be a violation of the contract between the two parties, which only includes the trees the DNR chose to mark, not the hundreds more we marked with identical paint and markings. We hope that by painting these additional trees we can stop them from taking any of them – or at least slow them down.

To other defenders of Yellowwood, there are many more trees left untouched. All it takes is red or blue marking paint, and some careful navigation. We wish you luck and look forward to all the other creative and inspiring ways you’ll think of to protect the land.

<3 N.O.P.E.
George Engel, Oscar Neebe, and Louis Lingg. Initially evading capture, Lingg was discovered in hiding on May 14. Not one for willing submission to the state, Lingg fought the two police who tried to arrest him—first with a gun, then with fists.

While Lingg was not present at the Haymarket the day of the bombing, the state's dogs claimed he was involved in making the bombs. Though no evidence links him to the bombthrowers—whose identity remains a mystery to this day—Lingg was a prolific producer of bombs and an intransigent enemy of authority. In a search of Lingg's apartment, investigators discovered two spherical and four pipe bombs.

After a notoriously prejudiced trial, the judge sentenced seven of the Haymarket defendants to death by hanging and Oscar Neebe to 15 years in prison. At his sentencing, Lingg remained defiant, proclaiming “I die happy on the gallows, so confident am I that the hundreds and thousands to whom I have spoken will remember my words. When you shall have hanged us, then they will do the bombthrowing! In this hope do I say to you, I despise you, I despise your order, your laws, your force propped up against me. Hang me for it.”

On November 10, 1887, the day before their execution date, the Governor of Illinois commuted Samuel Fielden's and Michael Schwab's sentences to life in prison (Fielden, Schwab, and Neebe would be released six years later after being pardoned by Governor John A. Altgeld). Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer were murdered by the state on November 11, 1887.

Louis Lingg chose a different response to his impending execution. Days after four bombs were discovered in his cell, Lingg placed a lit blasting cap in his mouth, blowing off his lower jaw. Before the guards could enter his cell, he scrawled “Hoch die anarchie!” (“Hurray for anarchy!”) on the prison cell stones in his own blood. Lingg died six hours later, refusing with his own suicide state authority's control over his life.

For more information on Louis Lingg and the Haymarket, read Paul Avrich’s extensive and engaging book The Haymarket Tragedy.

To honor Louis Lingg’s rebellious life, we present an unpublished poem he wrote in 1886, discovered in the Labadie Collection.

TO A TRODDEN PANSY

A broken stem, a pansy blossom crushed
In dirt, yet caught in all of Nature's store
Revels in scorn at what we all deplore
In it. Wert thou where careless footsteps rushed?
'Neath what thou stoodst thy loveliest, before
Dark destiny had rolled its shadow o'er,
Ere yet thine innocence for cause had blushed?
Canst we read naught not writ in Custom's scroll?
Living and human, cast in a finer mold,
Canst we read naught not writ in Custom's scroll?
In dirt, yet naught in all of Nature's store
What it means to fight from where you stand.
I know people here will respond to this as we do to the many other challenges we face: with care, creativity, joy, humor and resolve. Our struggle is long, and our lives are spent in commitment to it. I have spent over a decade organizing and building family with some of the bravest and kindest people I could imagine knowing. I have known, long before now, the depths of our strength, and it is with honor to that strength that I say that there is nothing on this earth that could compel me to degrade my integrity by testifying in a grand jury. Katie Yow

Solidarity

Grand Juries are an investigative tool often used by the state against people engaged in liberatory struggles. Towards the ultimate goal of securing indictments, they compel testimony (i.e. snitching), under threat of imprisonment. It is illegal to refuse to cooperate with a grand jury, and penalties range from empty threats to months or years in prison even before a single indictment has come down. There is a long history of refusing to testify to grand juries (and an equally long history of those who don't refuse to testify getting, at minimum, expelled from radical communities, projects, and spaces).

Inspiriting stories of grand jury resistance in the recent past range from New York City to Salt Lake City, Standing Rock, and the Pacific Northwest; from anarchist to socialist liberation and indigenous struggles.

Most recently, two separate grand jury subpoenas have been served to anarchists in North Carolina, Katie Yow and Jayden Savino. The grand jury targeting Katie seems to be part of an investigation of what the government has described as a bombing at the GOP headquarters in Hillsborough, NC last fall. Because of the secret nature of grand juries, it is not yet clear what the investigation of Jayden is related to, but they appear to be different. However, the timing and location suggest a trend of increasing, coordinated state repression.

Both Katie and Jayden have openly and unequivocally refused to testify.

I cannot begin to explain what defending the land and the people I call home means to me, but I want you to express that my resistance to this grand jury comes from my fierce love for them. I was raised in movement by bold and resilient elders, inheriting histories of resistance that taught me what it means to fight from where you stand. I know people here will respond to this as we do to the many other challenges we face: with care, creativity, joy, humor and resolve. Our struggle is long, and our lives are spent in commitment to it. I have spent over a decade organizing and building family with some of the bravest and kindest people I could imagine knowing. I have known, long before now, the depths of our strength, and it is with honor to that strength that I say that there is nothing on this earth that could compel me to degrade my integrity by testifying in a grand jury. Katie Yow

We made this banner and posted this picture to show Jayden and Katie that we care, that we are paying attention to their resistance to the state's attempts to coerce them, and that we will support them if repressive measures are escalated against them. Whenever repression comes down on people in and around our struggles, it is important to support them for many reasons. Besides the obvious ethical responsibilities of having our comrades’ backs, when they see they are supported, it signals to them that they are not facing the repression alone. This decreases the chance of them cooperating with the state, increases their capacity for defiant resistance, and demonstrates to those looking in on our movements that we are strong enough to resist the state’s attempts to fool us.

The confidence that people will have your back if the state comes down on you helps people to both take audacious offensive action, and resist grand juries or other forms of repression and coercion.
FUCK YOUR SELFIE
ON THE SPECTACLE OF RESISTANCE FROM BLOOMINGTON TO HAMBURG

The following article was written in the wake of the recent riots in Hamburg against the G20. I'm republishing it with additional commentary because I feel it raises questions that transcend its specific context, questions essential to developing a culture of direct action in Bloomington. To open further discussion, I’ll discuss two points: anonymity and spectacle/diagramization. It is dangerous to engage in openly confrontational or (potentially) illegal action with your face visible or only partially covered. The state, and non-state enemies like the Alt Right, can and will use any images obtained from demonstrations to dox, investigate, or prosecute demonstrators after the fact. Even in the case of seeming “legal” demonstrations (let’s not forget that unpermitted marches in the streets of downtown are not legally legal), there is a high risk of illegal action in self-defense (ex: defending your comrades against cars that unpermitted marches in the streets of Bloomington). By refusing to hide our identities, we are stating from the outset that: a) every demonstration is a battle for defensive safety. (For those seeking tips on safely protecting your identity at demonstrations or actions, see “How to Mask Up” in Plain Words #1 or online.)

The second critique – of turning all action into a spectacle for social media – is equally important. We so often find ourselves at demonstrations surrounded by smartphones, with people taking selfies, sending texts, and livestreaming. Rather than pushing street actions in more creative or interesting directions, many of those who join us in the streets seem more concerned with documenting the image of the moment than actually participating in it. This results in a theater of resistance, in which the same old symbolic protests that make for good photo ops take priority over actions that may materially challenge or disrupt systems of power. Kept within the realm of social media and its corresponding ideology of pacified appearance, these demonstrations lose any possibility of putting us in touch with our collective ability to think, feel and act. Trapped by the spectacle as in amber, we observe much but are little.

I’d like to see this as a catalyst for conversation. What role, if any, should social media serve in our projects and initiatives? What role does documentation play in demonstrations? How do we protect ourselves from the surveillance state and Alt Right doxxing? How do we develop forms of communication that do not rely upon Facebook, Google, Instagram, Twitter, or possibly the internet at all? How do we develop a sense of collective responsibility for our safety, and generalize this knowledge so as to avoid the media-constructed division of “maskied anarchists” and “good protest-ers”?

Margot V.

Much remains to be said on this topic, in particular free to email Plain Words at plainwordsblooming ton[@]riseup[dot]net with your own thoughts.

‘About the holidays in Hamburg’: selfies, disorders and the tyranny of images

A month ago in Hamburg, Germany, a G20 summit was beginning, and with it mass protests against it, with demands for a more ‘human’ running of capitalism, up to the total destruction of private worlds.

Good TV kills creativity, because there is no reason to think or struggle with what to do with your time when screens can connect you to instant entertainment. What to do with one’s time is hardly a question people need to grapple with, because TV fills in the empty slots in one’s daily routine. There is no urgency to deal with a society that is destroying everything via environmental, mental, intellectual, emotional, and oppression, because the ability to distract or easily entertain ourselves always exists.

People have rapidly been losing the talent towards communicating with each other face-to-face. This tendency, hundreds of years old, gets worse every generation with the increasing mediation of information technology. It’s a common cultural trope to notice that people hardly communicate with each other instead talk at each other. In our era, the lure of mediating technology or voluntary isolation via staying home and watching shows is a result and further cause of this phenomenon. The more awkward we are, the more we want to stay inside, and the more we stay inside, the more awkward we become.

In addition to pulling people towards isolation, television and similar media forms of entertainment unquestionably as it is. The portrayals of life mimic the structure of the lives we live now, and therefore reinforce the hegemony of this way of life in our minds. This is not an intentional strategy of elites scheming in a smoky corporate boardroom, rather it is built into the technology itself.

Daily life, social relationships, value systems, technology, and even the geography of infrastructure are specific to capitalism at this stage of its development. The daily experience of waking up, commuting, working, commuting, watching Netflix, and going to sleep is only one of millions of forms of life that could exist. Capitalism has colonized the world to prevent us from discovering and creating almost any other. But the characters in shows and movies have somewhat similar daily lives as us, and their relationships look like ours. If things deviate, it is in specific genres like fantasy or science fiction where the deviation is part of the appeal. When viewing these spectacles on a ongoing basis, the rhythms and forms of daily life under capitalism are emulated in our minds, so that it doesn’t seem like life could be any different.

To be clear, television does not “defend” this conceptualization of life, in fact specifically does not do this. Rather, it presents images caricaturing our daily lives, our relationships, and the way we conceptualize everything as normal. Like all ideology, it carousestilizes itself as natural. Any benign intentions for producing succulent content using TV, and visions of TV existing in a post-capitalist world, would unknowingly create these same conditions of isolation and ideology.

Conclusion

I want television, and the world that it mirrors, to be totally razed to the ground. The world I dream of surely has stoves, roleplaying, and other similar forms of play, but not in such a mind-numbing form as television.

I don’t know what I want readers to take from this essay. I don’t know what anybody’s life is like but my own, and I’m not interested in telling people what to do with their daily lives or how to engage politically. But I do know that this society mystifies what it’s doing to people, and I’m interested in pointing these things out when I see them. Since television sucks roughly five hours of life every day from people in the US on average [1], it seems like an important thing to notice and think about. Especially for those of us that want collective revolt and to develop lives of our own subversive desires.

fisc and naïve attempts at reform can be. The Sopranos was a commercial success, The Wire is not so much outside of liberal and academic circles, but both demonstrated to the television industry that viewers were interested in shows that had effort and care put into them, and wanted more than mindless entertainment. Hence shows like True Detective, which boasts numerous literary and philosophical sources and references.

While they are not always as deep as The Sopranos or The Wire, there has since been a proliferation of “series” which are ongoing stories, like the soap operas of the past, except with more care put into crafting characters and plot, as well as higher budgets in designing sets and hiring actors. Unlike episodic shows where everything more-gets in designing sets and hiring actors. Unpast, except with more care put into crafting ongoing stories, like the soap operas of the past, except with more care put into crafting characters and plot, as well as higher budgets in designing sets and hiring actors. Unlike episodic shows where everything more.

Likely resulting from instant viewer feedback in internet forums and social media, market researchers for these media companies have honed in on what both they did poorly in the past and how to now tailor shows to specific demographics. Additionally, cultural critiques produced by academics in the 90s detailed ways that shows and movies were racist, homophobic, and sexist. And they kill the imagination by putting us into a compulsive traffic of images, steering us through god knows how many narratives that are irrelevant here, I won’t comment on them. This has led to certain shows now having as their primary target the 8-year-olds who are curious); and as I couldn’t go to Hamburg (and I’m sorry about that) for reasons that are irrelevant here, I won’t comment on what happened or go into detail. The comrades who were there have talked about that and continue to do so.

I’d like to talk about a particular aspect of these demonstrations, which I think occurs too often in this kind of context, and which seems a serious problem, at least to me, and one that annoys me. It’s what is known as the ‘tyranny of the image’. Everything is heroism and publicity, aesthetics, revolution between flashes and ‘selfies’. Every time something happens. But it is important to maintain a culture of safety and above all to bear in mind that when you photograph yourself you are not only exposing yourself only but also the people around you or other comrades who at that moment are taking part in the events, and maybe don’t want to be part of your irresponsible fetishism.

For a culture of safety and respon-sibility. Against the fetishism of images and hoodies.
I n the grip of modern capitalism we face destitutions both material and social. Precarious employment, debt, exorbitant rent, and a diminishing welfare safety net are complimented by ubiquitous information technology that hinders the development of real life social skills, perpetuating neurotic anxiety and self-loathing which follows perceived failures to meet expected social roles. Both destitutions can be seen as “falling through the cracks,” where people fail to meet society’s norms in achieving a middle-class income, and/or fostering relationships of affection, friendship, and love. One can imagine that these destitute people see themselves as losers, and hence gravitate towards opportunities to be in power related to their perceived failures to meet expected social roles. Both destitutions can be seen as perceptions of real life social skills, perpetuating neurotic anxiety and self-loathing which become available for men with lighter color skin, are possible opportunity for power, especially selective struggles, the destitute will take what is within reach and the limits of current collectives. Liberation. But with no horizon of revolution in sight and the limits of current collective struggles, the destitute will take what they can get. The easiest and most accessible opportunity for power, especially seductive for men with lighter color skin, are the sectors of the internet where “right trolls specialize in tormenting marginalized people through social media. As the popular adage about bullying goes, the weak become the strong by preying on others that are weak. At the moment, and conceivably in the future, the formula is: Privilege = Power + Humiliation + the Internet = Far-Right Trolling.

In the past, those who capitalist society shaped to be losers and needs would rectify their powerlessness by becoming an authority on a commodity or spectacle of their choice. Developing encyclopedic knowledge of video games, music genres, and Star Trek episodes while being condescending to those not in the know replicates a feeling of authority, and instills a fleeting sense of confidence about something, regardless how pathetic. This way of asserting power over others is passive and somewhat harmless, adopted only because it’s within reach.

Contrast this with the typical images of racial hatred in the post-war period: southern brutes drunkenly assaulting by a black family to harass and attack them. The aforementioned losers, having too little confidence in themselves and their strength, would likely not be participants in such blantly confrontational acts.

But different opportunities arise with the internet’s anonymity and everyone being “within reach” due to social networks. Every powerless person who occupies a position of even marginal privilege now has the easy ability to go to 4chan, participate in a coordinated harassment, perhaps of a black celebrity or any visible Trans person, and feel the deranged psychological benefit of asserting power over another. Similarly, men who have been trained to see women as objects, intimidating ones they are incapable of talking to without being creepy, can use social media to lash out in their impotence by tormenting, dosing, and threatening them.

The internet has created an easy pathway for the powerless-yes-privileged to become monsters in a vain reach for power. Who would have thought that hell would be participatory and decentralized?

“Become un goverable” is a slogan anarchists like to use these days. It sounds cool and fits the anarchist aesthetic of revolt and spectacular conflict. It doesn’t immediately mean much, but that’s the beauty of it, the meaning shifts with each person and the specificities of their lives. With no revolution and lots of environmental catastrophe, state violence, and “active shooter situations” on the horizon, rather than despising at our no-future future, it instead contains a path forward: to refuse submission to law, duty, and passivity in daily life.

But “become un goverable?” As in, transform your life into one of un governability? This is where things get tricky. Capitalism and the technology developed through it have created conditions that hinder the creation of long-term life habits outside those of passivity and consumption. The toys of information technology are small but contain terabytes of distraction, ever pulling their users’ attention towards them, like a tiny black hole’s massive gravitational well. Bursts of energy and spectacular moments responding to a crisis generated by capitalism may clear people away from the daily grind for days, weeks, or even months, but the system has tools to pull people back in. That’s a lot to dissect here, but this essay is going to stick to one element of it: good TV.

We are living in the era of “good TV” or the “golden era of TV,” a relatively new phenomenon where TV series are being praised as intelligent, gripping, and even works of art. Until the last decade, “the idiot box” had somehow gotten to be something of a bad reputation. While most of the masses were sucked in by it as they are today, it seemed like people back then knew even as they watched it that it was mindless entertainment, and rolled their eyes at all the laugh tracks, game shows, and sentimentality.

Since TV was a vehicle for commodity, shows were crafted to appeal to the lowest common denominator, and therefore contained the least controversial and most normative portrayals of characters and life. They featured almost exclusively attractive white actors playing static and one-dimensional cliché characters. With “good TV” shows have compelling ongoing stories, comedies have become sharper, and characters have a wider spectrum of emotions and are no longer just straight white people. Additionally, niche audiences are targeted with subcultural anecdotes, political jokes, aesthetic, and tone which prompt viewers to more easily identify with specific shows. In other words: TV’s reputation has gone up, and it is not seen as something to avoid or try to disconnect from.

The “good” quality of programming rose out of the success of HBO’s The Sopranos and The Wire in the early 2000s. The dark, moody Sopranos used subtle literary techniques and complex symbolism while telling stories about organized crime as more broad metaphors and critiques of contemporary American life. The Wire, similarly pessimistic, detailed the intrigue and contradictions revolving around the Drug War in urban America to point out how dif-